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RRR 21.1 EDITORIAL

The first article in this issue, by Scott Amos, offers an enlightening study of the traditional interpretation of one of the most tragic and repugnant narratives in the Bible. This scriptural hard place, Judges 11:29-40, is the report of the pious execution (burning) by Jephthah, a model of fidelity to a vow, of his innocent, virgin and nameless daughter, a model of pious submissiveness to her father. This filicide occurred not because of some awful command of God, rather because of a thoughtless promise made to the Lord by the father – who did not anticipate the involvement of his only child. Amos recalls that the consensus (if not wholly unanimous) in Christian, medieval, and Reformation tradition was that for all his recklessness, Jephthah emerged with honour. Jewish and rabbinical tradition was more divided – a clear alternative view held that the girl was not so much condemned to physical death as to a life of celibacy. This charitable interpretation, Amos demonstrates, was appropriated by Christian Hebraists within the Reformation movement, like S. Münster and K. Pellikan as well as some theologians like J. Brenz and, later, M. Borrhaus, L. Lavater, and D. Chytraeus. It is suggested, however, the continued prevalence of the traditional Christian view in the Protestant tradition was also conditioned by suspicions of subversive ‘Judaization’ (especially if humane) and of (inhumane) vows of celibacy (monasticism), so that theology countermanded grammar.

Martin Biersack’s instructive study of the reception and function of Italian Renaissance educational ideals in late-medieval Spain, especially Castile, offers two general insights. First and indirectly: while Renaissance humanism helped universally to stimulate ideas of reform or better management in church and society, it was not necessarily a secondary breeding ground of frank dissent and Protestant Reformation ideas everywhere (even if later in Spain there were some such manifestations as in Valladolid and Seville etc. – quickly extirpated). Second: in Spanish hands, the programmatic and strategic adoption of the Classics by its educational institutions, the royal court and some echelons of the nobility and church meant an ideologically controlled humanism. This functioned as a further prophylactic against counter-cultural impulses which might spawn heterodoxy or revive notions of religious pluralism in a very self-consciously re-Catholicized Spain. Biersack also argues that humanist training and the emergence of a new educated elite in Spain did not subvert the in-built privileges and authority of the traditional civil service or legal profession, the nobility in general, and faculties of theology. Such an instinctively conservative,

if revamped, configuration helped ensure stability, continuity and cohesion in what became a redoubt of Roman Catholic Christianity.

Nathan Sasser's article takes us into the treatment of the borderlands between Bible, theology and metaphysics within the evolving Reformed tradition of natural theology. This eventually took a new look at the poles of understanding creation in medieval scholastic theology (Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventura) as well as at some early-Enlightenment thought (Leibniz, Samuel Clarke, Hobbes). The essay, therefore, focusses on the handling of cosmology and its various proofs including theistic ones. This is against the background of early Reformed subscription to the belief in the impossibility of an eternal world and of non-temporal emanation theories of causation (as biblical belief in the end of time and the world seems to imply). The author takes the reader on a selective, but highly informative, guided tour of thinkers on the topic including the chief medieval scholastics, Calvin and subsequent Reformed orthodox theologians (especially Turretin and a variety of later, largely English and Scottish religious thinkers up to the eighteenth century). Consistency is claimed for the repudiation of the rationalizing cosmological idea of Thomas, Clarke and Leibniz that an eternal, yet contingent, creation is conceivable.

The final article, by Andrew Spicer, takes a relatively novel approach to one of the famous works published by J.A. Comenius, Czech or Moravian churchman belonging to the broadly Reformed Unity of Brethren, ecumenical religious thinker, visionary and progressive educationist. Spicer examines Comenius's landmark *Orbis sensualium pictus* [The Visible World in Pictures] first published in 1658 and followed by scores of editions as well as numerous translations including English. The author points out that this widely read, and much studied, work has predominantly grabbed the attention of students of pedagogical theory (visual aids and experiential learning as against rote learning, memorization, repetition etc.) and of philosophy (universalism, cosmological awareness, reasoning processes). Here, however, the focus is on the rather neglected religious, trans-confessional and church-architectural dimensions of Comenius's book – a neglect that demotes his ultimate concern. This is a Christian understanding of the physical, natural and cultural world as the benevolent work of God – an understanding temporarily blurred by the co-existence of the three monotheistic faiths, which, Comenius hopes, will all end up Christian. True to the Comenius principles, the article is very richly endowed with many splendid illustrations drawn from the book's woodcuts created in Nuremberg workshops.

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